

Date: Feb 9, 2016

Testimony before the Oregon House of Representative
Consumer Protection and Government Effectiveness Committee
Relating to HB 4122 restoring local control to the regulation of genetically engineered crops

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

My husband Rene' Berblinger and I own and operate Gales Meadow Farm in Gales Creek, Oregon. We grow more than 300 varieties of organic vegetables and herbs, which we sell to restaurants in Portland and on the North Coast and at Farmers Markets in Portland and Cannon Beach. We also produce many thousands of vegetable and herb starts for home gardeners and other farmers. At the height of the season, we employ six or seven people. Even now in February, we have three employees whose work totals about 50 hours a week among them, plus my husband, our daughter and myself.

We grow and save our own seed for about 80 of our varieties, a handful of which are products of our own breeding, and a significant number of which are unusual. If our growing plants were to be contaminated by pollen from genetically engineered plants, we would lose either our organic certification or the ability to save our seed and offer many of these varieties.

I am even more concerned about the Oregon companies that grow seed for some of the varieties our customers and we love the most. I brought with me today some leaves of kale from Oregon seed producers: White Russian, Old Growth Palm Tree Lacinato, and Rainbow Lacinato from Wild Garden Seed in Philomath, and Russian Frills, Baltic Red, and Bear Necessities from Adaptive Seed in Sweet Home. Our favorite Prismatic Chard is from Siskiyou Seeds in Williams, Oregon. This year, we are trying out an open pollinated sweet corn variety, Top Hat, which was bred in Southern Oregon. All of these varieties are vulnerable to contamination from commonly grown GMO crops.

I have been a farmer for sixteen seasons. For 36 years, before I quit my day job in 2007, I worked in economic development. An important lesson from that experience is this: putting at risk healthy growing local businesses which have a competitive advantage by being where they are in order to attract or accommodate new economic activity that is just like what's already going on everywhere else is a stupendous blunder. Many Oregon counties are pretty sophisticated about economic development. They ought to have the authority to protect their seed growers, their organic farmers, and their conventional farmers who sell into markets that reject GMO crops.

One morning last summer, we watched the farm across the highway spray their field from a helicopter. They knew what they were doing. Not a bit of wind was stirring that day, so we were safe from drift. The use of pesticides is strictly regulated. If their pesticides had drifted onto our organic crops, we would have had some recourse for any damage that had been done. And yet, there is no regulation to control the spread of GMO pollen, which can cause damage that lasts not just for one season, or for the three years it takes to regain organic certification, but forever in the loss of pure seed.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and I urge you to pass HB 4122.

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